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Letter dated 3 February 2016 from the Permanent Representative of Swaziland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to write, in my capacity as the chairman of the African Group for the month of February 2016, first, to present the African Group's best wishes to you at the dawn of a new year and for the successful conclusion of your mandate and, second, to address the issue of the upcoming unveiling of the commemorative "Free and equal" postage stamps promoting LGBT equality worldwide, co-organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the United Nations Postal Administration. The unveiling is scheduled to be held on Thursday, 4 February 2016, at 3 p.m. in the lobby of the General Assembly Building.

The African Group notes with interest and indeed serious reservations that the "Free and equal" postage stamps to be unveiled are aiming at promoting LGBT equality worldwide. In particular, the African Group is concerned that the notions of sexual orientation and gender identity related to LGBT continue to be controversial among United Nations Member States, and the African Group has consistently maintained its stance in accordance with the decision adopted by African leaders at the fifteenth ordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union, held in Kampala, which, among other things, strongly rejected any attempt to undermine the international human rights system by seeking to impose concepts or notions pertaining to social matters, including private individual conduct that falls outside the internationally agreed human rights legal framework.

The African Group therefore views notions of sexual orientation and gender identity related to LGBT as a negation of article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and that they undermine the right of Member States to enact laws that meet "just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society". Moreover, the Group is of the view that giving priority to the rights of certain individuals could result in negative discrimination at the expense of other internationally agreed rights and thereby run counter to the principles of non-discrimination and equality.

As a matter of procedure, the African Group is even more concerned that an intergovernmental consultative process had not guided the decision-making process

regarding this highly controversial issue, as is the usual practice regarding United Nations events organized by United Nations entities at United Nations Headquarters, and, ultimately, it raises a number of legal and financial issues. The Group is of the view that obtaining approval from Member States for organizing such an event is imperative in order to avoid any chance of undermining the respected emblem of the United Nations logo by associating it with issues that do not enjoy universal consensus.

It is in view of the foregoing that the African Group would like to appeal to you to kindly consider the cancellation of the unveiling event, scheduled to be held on 4 February 2016, regarding the postage stamps promoting LGBT equality worldwide with a view to submitting the issue for consideration through the usual intergovernmental process.

The African Group should be most grateful if the present letter would be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(*Signed*) Zwelethu **Mnisi**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative